

Current
Policy No. 268

Aid for African Refugees

March 19, 1981



United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

U. S. DEPOSITORY DOCUMENT

APR 24 1981

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Following is a statement by W. R. Smyser, Acting Director of the Bureau of Refugee Programs, before the Subcommittees on Africa and on International Organizations of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 19, 1981.

I am pleased to discuss with you our program of assistance for African refugees. At the time of the Department of State's testimony before the Africa subcommittee last year, Africa's refugee problem, although of immense magnitude, was not well known to the world community. Today this is no longer the case. The world's attention is focusing more and more on the needs of the several million refugees in Africa. This is a welcome development to all people who are concerned about the very large number of Africans who are victims of civil strife and political persecution. I should add also that increased world awareness of this major humanitarian problem is a matter of crucial importance to U.S. policy interests. Several African countries which are our staunch friends are seriously affected by the presence within their borders of hundreds of thousands of homeless and destitute refugees.

The U.S. Government, over the past year, has made substantial contributions to ongoing multilateral efforts on this issue. We and others have worked successfully to raise the world's awareness of this critical humanitarian and political problem. Subsequently, we have begun to see the results of these efforts in increasing availabilities of international assistance for African refugees. There is no question that our government's

efforts were strengthened at each step in this process by close collaboration between the Administration and concerned committees and individuals in the Congress. We therefore look forward to continuing in a cooperative effort with you and others in Congress to make sure that the United States does its share to strengthen the international community's refugee relief efforts in Africa.

The Department's mandate includes both the care and maintenance of refugees in their countries of asylum outside the United States and the resettlement of refugees in this country. In the African context, the first of these functions is by far the more important due to the nature of the African refugee situation. Nevertheless, in the past year we have made significant progress in implementing an appropriate African refugee admissions program as well, in accordance with the provisions of the 1980 Refugee Act.

The implementation of our African refugee program has been an interdepartmental effort. As a result of the division of responsibilities within the U.S. Government, assistance for refugees falls within the mandate of the Department of State and assistance for internally displaced persons falls almost entirely within the mandate of the Agency for International Development (AID). Further distinctions exist between emergency relief assistance for refugees and long-term development assistance or infrastructure building as these affect refugee relief operations and refugee resettlement. There is also a distinction between nonfood relief for refugees and food assistance.

Congress has provided funds to different agencies and offices to cover these assistance needs. But obviously these functions are often interrelated, and distinctions are at times hard to draw. Consequently, the Department of State has collaborated closely with the Department's Bureau of African Affairs and offices in other government agencies—all of the Agency for International Development, primarily AID's Office of Food for Peace and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance—to insure that the long- and short-term food and nonfood needs of the refugees and displaced persons in Africa are taken into consideration.

U.S. Efforts

For FY 1981, the Department of State requested a total of \$54 million in nonfood aid for African refugees. This figure includes \$35 million for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), \$7 million for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and \$12 million for special projects and bilateral assistance. Although we are operating under the terms of a continuing resolution, we are taking steps, possibly including reprogramming actions and reallocation of other resources available to the Department, to insure that nonfood contributions to African refugees in FY 1981 will be funded at least at the \$54 million level for the entire fiscal year. To date in FY 1981, we have pledged \$28.3 million to the UNHCR's general program for Africa and \$7 million to the ICRC. We are also continuing to support a number of urgent bilateral projects through voluntary organizations and with the assistance of the Public Health Service's Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.

Food contributions to refugees in Africa are administered by AID's Office of Food for Peace. Our FY 1981 food contribution to African refugees is expected to total \$42 million, which includes transport. The levels of our food aid in 1982 will be determined later in the year when food needs are more clearly known.

For FY 1982, the State Department has requested \$77 million for nonfood aid for African refugees. The Agency for International Development's FY 1982 request also includes \$20 million for long-term resettlement projects for refugees and displaced persons.

The bulk of the funds expended by the Department of State for African refugees is channeled through international organizations. In FY 1980, for ex-

ample, 84% of the \$56.1 million U.S. Government contribution of nonfood refugee assistance was made through the UNHCR and the ICRC. We intend to continue our multilateral approach in FY 1981 and FY 1982.

Internationalization of African refugee relief is clearly our most desirable and effective option. This is true for two reasons. First, by making the international organizations the focal point for refugee relief, the responsibility for providing needed humanitarian assistance correctly rests on all donor nations rather than solely on the United States. Second, it is in our political interest to involve other nations in this effort.

I should stress that reliance on international organizations does not reduce the role of the Department of State in the area of African refugee relief. Rather, in order to insure that refugees' needs are being met and that the international organizations remain accountable for their activities, we have undertaken a multiplicity of functions on a continuing basis. These responsibilities include monitoring the conditions in Africa which create refugee problems; evaluating the relief programs carried out by the international organizations in support of the African refugees; and working closely to accomplish these purposes with a broad group of the interested parties, including African and other governments.

Since our last appearance before the Subcommittee on Africa, our efforts have taken many directions. We view as some of our more noteworthy accomplishments over the past year:

- The establishment of the Somalia Refugee Working Group in early 1980, which in the initial stages of the Somali refugee emergency provided critically needed food and other relief supplies and which, I am convinced, assured the survival of the refugees;
- The successful completion of on-site situation assessments in Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Cameroon, Zaire, and other African countries which have led to realistic planning and more appropriate responses by the international organizations, the U.S. Government, and other donors; and
- The establishment of excellent communications and collaboration within the U.S. Government and between us and affected African governments, other donor nations, the private voluntary sector, and international organizations.

In addition to the above, during the past year, U.S. funding for African refugee relief rose considerably over the previous years' levels. Total U.S. assistance for African refugees, including food and nonfood and from State Department and AID sources, rose from \$63 million in FY 1979 to nearly \$105 million in FY 1980. The U.S. contribution to refugee relief in Somalia alone in FY 1980 totaled \$53 million. In Somalia, our contribution of 114,000 metric tons of food in FY 1980, valued with transport at \$35 million, represented approximately 80% of all food donated to Somali refugees in that year. Our contribution of \$18 million worth of nonfood assistance to Somali refugees was close to one-half of all such contributions. In the future, I believe that 1980 will be seen as a turning point in our government's recognition of African refugee needs.

I would like to mention briefly another aspect of our African refugee program for 1980. That is our African refugee admissions program. Most refugees in Africa traditionally have been welcome to remain in African countries of asylum. This is a humane and praiseworthy attitude, and we should do what we can to support its continuation. Fortunately this situation still prevails, and we consider it to be in the best interests of the African countries and of the individual refugees themselves. However, in certain instances, settlement in an African country is not possible. Last year following the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980 and with the help of the Department of Justice and of numerous American voluntary agencies, we expanded our program of African refugee admissions to the United States. This program has as its aim to provide resettlement opportunities to those who are in genuine need while avoiding an unnecessarily traumatic separation for large numbers of people from familiar climates and cultures. As part of this admissions program, we have retained the necessary latitude to offer resettlement to urgent cases from any country in Africa where refugees come to our Embassies' attention.

Critical Problems

Calendar year 1981 promises to present new challenges to our African refugee program. One of the most troubling aspects of the current situation is that several ongoing conflicts in Africa will probably not soon reach solutions which would allow the refugees to return to

their homes. As a result, the monumental assistance requirements which have arisen over the past few years will persist. This state of affairs is further exacerbated by the fact that both the asylum countries and the donor countries are facing serious internal economic difficulties.

Today's most critical African refugee problems are in Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Zaire, and Cameroon. In Somalia the situation is especially acute where refugees from the fighting in Ethiopia have been arriving at an average rate of more than 1,000 a day since October 1979. Earlier this year, the Government of Somalia estimated the refugee population in the more than 35 camps at over 1 million. Some half million more refugees in Somalia are believed to be struggling to survive outside the camps. However, because numbers of refugees often are difficult to estimate, a new assessment of the scope of the Somali refugee population will soon be undertaken. The currently estimated requirements for the refugees in Somalia for 1981 are \$85 million worth of nonfood assistance and 283,000 metric tons of food. The U.S. Government intends to continue its support for refugee relief in Somalia within the framework of the ongoing needs of that situation.

Sudan is host to nearly 500,000 refugees, over 350,000 of whom are Ethiopians who have fled either the Socialist revolution or widespread ongoing strife in their home country. Tens of thousands of Ethiopian refugees have crowded into many of Sudan's cities while another even larger group is concentrated in the rural areas of Sudan along the Ethiopian border. In addition to the Ethiopians in Sudan, nearly 100,000 Ugandans are living in the eastern Equatoria province near the Uganda and Zaire borders.

Zaire's already large refugee population grew during the last quarter of 1980 when tens of thousands of residents of the West Nile district of Uganda fled disturbances in that area and joined the 54,000 Ugandan refugees who had come to northeastern Zaire in 1979. A recent U.S. Government study estimated a current total of 80,000-100,000 Ugandans living in northeastern Zaire but found that the refugees frequently move back and forth across the border to acquire food and to escape

military or rebel harassment on both sides. In addition to the Ugandans, Zaire is host to approximately 400,000 other refugees, mostly from Angola.

Following the outbreak of fighting in Ndjamen in March 1980, much of the population of that city fled across the river to Kousseri, a small village in northern Cameroon. Approximately 80,000 Chadian refugees in Cameroon are still in need of relief assistance.

International Conference

Africa's refugee problems will be at the forefront of the world's attention next month when an international conference for assistance to refugees in Africa meets in Geneva April 9-10. The conference, which is in response to a General Assembly resolution calling for increased assistance for Africa's refugees, is jointly sponsored by the U.N. Secretary General's office, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It is expected that a large number of European and African countries will be represented at the ministerial level or above. The composition of the U.S. delegation will be announced in the near future.

The United States has supported the idea of the conference since its inception and views the success of this conference as an important aspect of our policy toward Africa in general and toward refugee relief in particular. Accordingly, for the past few months we have lent our support to efforts to insure that the conference will satisfy the purposes of the recipient and the donor countries alike. These efforts have included discussions with African governments and the OAU, the European Community, the Development Assistance Council of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the U.N. Secretary General's office, and the High Commissioner for Refugees. We feel confident that these efforts have been worthwhile and we are looking forward to the conference in Geneva as an opportunity to express to the African governments and the world community our concern over the plight of African refugees and our support for international efforts to assist them. We intend to announce a level of

U.S. assistance at the conference which will be supportive of the needs of African refugees. It is our hope that the conference will serve to encourage other donors also to contribute generously to African refugee relief.

Future Concerns


A look to the future for improvement in the current refugee situation in Africa is not encouraging. Signals in certain parts of Africa, and the African security situation in general, are unsettling to the point where we would be unwise not to anticipate future needs. A disturbing proof of this trend is that, over the past few years, the number of African refugees assisted by UNHCR programs has grown from 700,000 to over 3 million. It is uncertain when this alarming expansion will cease.

Given the current conditions and the outlook for the future, it is essential that the channels of communication which have developed over the past year remain open and that close collaboration with all interested parties continues. The role of our office in this process has developed significantly since we last testified before the Africa Subcommittee. We will continue to look to the Congress for support and assistance on these important issues. ■

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